

Israel's Discriminatory History

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The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement has been formed to peacefully put pressure on Israel to end its discriminatory practices against Palestinians. Various Zionist/Jewish groups have been established to oppose the BDS strategy. One such organization is The Academic Engagement Network (AEN), which states that it is an active organization of American college and university faculty opposing the BDS movement.^[1]

Mark Yudof, Chair of AEN's Advisory Board, states: "[T]he BDS strategy is also a blatant attempt to co-opt the language of human rights: Israel is a settler nation, a bastion of white privilege, a racist and apartheid state, and a perpetrator of alleged genocide."^[2] This article will analyze whether Yudof's criticism of the BDS strategy is historically accurate.

Israel Formed by Ethnic Cleansing

Israel was formed by the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Palestinian population. There were 600,000 Jewish Palestinians and 1.3 million Arab Palestinians in December 1947. Jews owned less than 7% of the land, and almost all of the cultivated land was owned by Arab Palestinians. Because of this demographic and geographical balance, the Arab Palestinians regarded any plan which did not allow them to decide their future as being unacceptable and immoral.^[3]

The United Nations decided to appease Jewish leader David Ben-Gurion by allowing an unlimited immigration of Jews and granting 55% of Palestine's land to the Jewish state. The Jewish community knew when it agreed to this U.N. plan that the Palestinians would reject such an unfair agreement. Israeli propaganda, however, has repeatedly used its acceptance of the U.N. plan and the Palestinian rejection to indicate Israel's peaceful intentions towards the Palestinians.^[4]

The Arab world did not have the military means to stop Zionist military aggression. Three months before Arab armies entered Palestine in May 1948, the Zionist military forces began to ethnically cleanse

Palestinians from their houses, fields and land. In the process, Zionist military forces added another 23% of Palestine's land to the 55% granted to them by the U.N. Israel as a state covered almost 80% of Palestine by January 1950.[\[5\]](#)

New documents released in 1998 from the archives of the Israel Defense Forces prove the planned massive, intentional expulsions of Palestinians.[\[6\]](#) The Zionist takeover of Palestine was aided by detailed files of every Palestinian village prepared by Haganah, the main Zionist underground militia in Palestine. These files, which included aerial photographs indicating the best access and entry points to each village as well as the number of weapons held in each home, enabled the Zionists to know how to best attack Palestinian villages.[\[7\]](#)

There were dozens of massacres in Palestinian villages during Israel's "War of Independence." Zionist forces were larger and better equipped than their opponents, and by the end of the war approximately 750,000 Palestinians were ruthlessly expelled from their homes. Half of the Palestinian villages were destroyed by the spring of 1949, flattened by Israeli bulldozers which had been at work since August 1948.[\[8\]](#) Israeli historian Tom Segev writes, "Israel was born of terror, war, and revolution, and its creation required a measure of fanaticism and of cruelty."[\[9\]](#)

Entire cities and hundreds of villages in Israel were left empty and repopulated with new Jewish immigrants. The Palestinians lost everything they had and became destitute refugees, while the Jewish immigrants stole the Palestinians' property and confiscated everything they needed.[\[10\]](#) Israeli historian Ilan Pappé writes that the Zionist takeover of Palestine "was a clear-cut case of an ethnic cleansing operation, regarded under international law today as a crime against humanity."[\[11\]](#)

Norman Finkelstein writes: "The injustice inflicted on Palestinians by Zionism was manifest and, except on racist grounds, unanswerable: their right to self-determination, and perhaps even to their homeland, was being denied."[\[12\]](#) Finkelstein concludes that "the scholarly consensus is that Palestinians were ethnically cleansed in 1948."[\[13\]](#)

Israel claimed that the majority of Palestinian refugees voluntarily fled and were not expelled. However, Israel did not allow the Palestinians to return to their homes as demanded by a U.N. resolution shortly after the 1948 war. The State of Israel was clearly formed through the ethnic cleansing of its indigenous Palestinian inhabitants.[\[14\]](#)

Israel Enforces Jewish Supremacy

Israeli leaders established a racist nation set up exclusively for Jews. A Palestinian who was born within the boundaries of what is now Israel cannot return to his homeland and become a citizen of Israel. By contrast, a Jew born outside of Israel can immigrate to Israel and be granted instant citizenship with numerous benefits. Israel has segregated housing areas, schools and recreational facilities where Palestinians are not allowed. The legality of marriage between Jews and Palestinians is also not recognized by Israeli law.[\[15\]](#)

Dr. Israel Shahak, a survivor of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, chaired the Israel League for Human and Civil Rights. Citing laws and regulations that have been rigorously enforced in Israel, Shahak contended that "the State of Israel is a racist state in the full meaning of this term because people are discriminated against, in the most permanent and legal way and in the most important areas of life, only because of their origin...one who is not a Jew is discriminated against, only because he is not a Jew."

Shahak denounced the “grave social discrimination visited upon any Israeli citizen every day of his life if his mother is not a Jewess.”[\[16\]](#)

The ethnic cleansing of Palestinians continued in June 1967 after the Six-Day War, which Israeli military leaders and American intelligence knew Israel would quickly win.[\[17\]](#) Israel conquered and occupied the West Bank from Jordan, the Gaza Strip from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria. These territories are still occupied by Israel today.[\[18\]](#) As an ethnocentric state, Israel denies voting rights and other political and civil liberties to the more than 4 million Palestinians in the occupied territories because of their non-Jewish ethnicity.

Approximately 300,000 Palestinians fled or were driven into exile as Israel conquered the West Bank and Gaza. Hundreds of villages were systematically razed, and over 2,000 Palestinian homes were demolished or sealed without charges or trial. The Israeli government confiscated fully 50% of the land and 80% of the water reserves in these territories. Approximately 100,000 Jews settled in the West Bank and Gaza to replace the exiled Palestinians.[\[19\]](#) These actions were in violation of U.N. Security Resolution 242, which demanded that Israel withdraw from all of the occupied territories in 1967.[\[20\]](#)

Palestinian Gaza has been turned into a massive prison ghetto. Surrounded by electronic fences and military posts, tightly sealed from the outside world, Palestinians in Gaza are forced to live in extreme poverty. Israeli linguistics professor Tanya Reinhart wrote: “What we are witnessing in the occupied territories—Israel’s penal colonies—is the invisible and daily killing of the sick and wounded who are deprived of medical care, of the weak who cannot survive in the new poverty conditions, and of those who are approaching starvation.”[\[21\]](#)

Israeli leaders proceeded to implement throughout the West Bank their model of control perfected in Gaza. Since May 2002, Israel has been constructing a wall in the West Bank which will make this system of control a reality when completed. Along the route under construction, Israel is dispossessing Palestinian farmers of their land and pushing them into small enclaves between fences and walls. Eventually Palestinians in the West Bank will be surrounded on all sides as Palestinians currently are in Gaza.[\[22\]](#)

Ilan Pappé writes, “On the ground, the occupied territories have become a mega-prison under strict military rule—which in many ways continues to this day.”[\[23\]](#) Steve Quester, a member of Jews against the Occupation, states that “[A]ll of the West Bank is a jail...”[\[24\]](#)

The Israeli Knesset has enacted numerous laws in recent years that discriminate against Palestinians. The Nakba Law of 2009, for example, stipulated that whoever would commemorate Israel’s day of independence as a day of mourning would be arrested. This law was slightly revised under international pressure: arrest was replaced by the denial of public funding to any entity that commemorates the Nakba. Since virtually all Palestinian institutions and homes remember and commemorate the Nakba, this law is highly discriminatory against Palestinians.[\[25\]](#)

Israel Perpetuates Incremental Genocide

Israel’s occupation and its settlements have been maintained through the organized and systematic use of violence. The rights of Palestinians have been ignored. Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir justified Israel’s violent policies when she infamously stated that “[t]here were no such things as Palestinians” and asserted, “It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a

Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist.”[\[26\]](#)

Living in a moral universe in which Israeli Jews are the permanent victims and Palestinians are invisible allows Israel to justify almost any measure. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin declared in the Knesset after Israel’s invasion of Lebanon, “No one, anywhere in the world, can preach morality to our people.” A similar statement was included in a resolution adopted by Begin’s cabinet after massacres in Palestinian refugee camps on the outskirts of Beirut.[\[27\]](#)

The Israeli military’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza has resulted in arbitrary killings and destruction on a daily basis. Amira Hass wrote in January 2005 that the Israeli army “controls Gaza through its fortified positions, which dominate densely populated residential areas; it controls Gaza with its airborne drones and their unceasing buzzing; the bulldozers that have not ceased demolishing, flattening, exposing, uprooting for the last four years; the helicopters that fire missiles; the military orders that turn roads and farmlands and half the coastline into areas ‘prohibited to Palestinians’ so that any Palestinian using them ends up dead; orders that close all the passages into Gaza; the tanks that fire into civilian neighborhoods with...tank shells and other forms of munitions with a frequency that makes it impossible to count them...”[\[28\]](#)

Ilan Pappé writes that what the Israeli army has been doing in the Gaza Strip since 2006 can appropriately be called an incremental genocide. Israeli military operations have been steadily escalating in every area. Ilan Pappé writes:[\[29\]](#)

Firstly, there was the disappearance of the distinction between “civilian” and “non-civilian” targets: the senseless killing had turned the population at large into the main target of the operation. Secondly, there was the escalation in the employment of every possible killing machine the Israeli army possesses. Thirdly, there was the conspicuous rise in the number of casualties. Finally, and most importantly, the operations gradually crystallized into a strategy, indicating the way Israel intends to solve the problem of the Gaza Strip in the future: through a measured genocidal policy. The people of the Strip, however, continued to resist. This led to further genocidal Israeli operations, but still today a failure to reoccupy the region.

A 2015 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report states: “Three Israeli military operations in the past six years, in addition to eight years of economic blockade, have ravaged the already debilitated infrastructure of Gaza, shattered its productive base, left no time for meaningful reconstruction or economic recovery and impoverished the Palestinian population in Gaza.” This UNCTAD report forecast that on the present trajectory, “Gaza will be unlivable” in 2020.[\[30\]](#)

The Israeli blockade is the cause of Gaza’s desperate plight. UNCTAD states in a follow-up report a year later: “Full recovery of the Gaza Strip is challenging without a lifting of the blockade, which collectively negatively affects the entire 1.8 million population of Gaza and deprives them of their economic, civil, social and cultural rights, as well as the right to development.” This Israeli siege constitutes a form of collective punishment and is a flagrant violation of international law.[\[31\]](#)

BDS Movement

Norman Finkelstein discusses the only realistic strategy for Gaza to end the Israeli blockade:[\[32\]](#)

A strategy of mass nonviolent resistance...might yet turn the tide. Gaza's richest resources are its people, the truth, and public opinion. Time and again, and come what may, the people of Gaza have evinced a granite will, born of a "sheer indomitable dignity"... not to be held in bondage... Truth is on the side of Gaza. If this book rises to a crescendo of anger and indignation, it's because the endless lies about Gaza by those who know better cause one's innards to writhe. Gandhi called his doctrine of nonviolence satyagraha, which he translated as "Hold on to the Truth." If the people of Gaza, in their multitudes, hold on to the truth, it's possible—which is not to say probable, let alone certain, just possible, and not without immense personal sacrifice, up to and including death—that Israel can be forced to lift the suffocating blockade.

The BDS movement is a nonviolent way for the international community to educate others and put pressure on Israel to treat Palestinians fairly. According to Jewish-Israeli BDS activist Jeff Halper, Israel's Occupation and Wall classify as apartheid because they meet precisely the definition of the word: separation of populations in a regime in which one population permanently dominates another. [33] However, Israel's discriminatory policies go beyond separation of populations.

Jewish-American BDS activist Anna Baltzer explains why BDS is needed: [34]

When a country violating human rights does not respond to decades of pressure through diplomatic efforts, international law, or rulings by the International Court of Justice, another level of pressure is needed. For example, when member states repeatedly violate resolutions, the United Nations often imposes sanctions like those currently being imposed on Sudan for occupation in Darfur.

*Israel has now violated more U.N. resolutions than any other country in the U.N. Nevertheless, any U.N. proposal to remove international complicity in Israel's transgressions has been systematically opposed by the United States through its veto in the U.N. Security Council. The question is not whether Israel should be singled out for BDS, **but whether it should be immune to the standard to which other countries are held.***

The world cannot wait for Israel to begin to treat Palestinians fairly. Israel will not change unless it has to. Norman Finkelstein writes: "...Israel will withdraw from the Occupied Territories only if Palestinians (and their supporters) can summon sufficient force to change the calculus of costs for Israel: that is, making the price of occupation too high. The historical record sustains this hypothesis." [35]

Conclusion

The historical record indicates that Israel is a racist, apartheid ethnostate formed through the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Palestinian population. Israel has a horrific human rights record, has violated more U.N. resolutions than any other country in the U.N. [36], and has mass murdered and tortured Palestinian civilians with impunity.

A grave injustice has been done to the Palestinian people. Alfred Lilienthal quoted Israeli humanist Rabbi Benjamin:

In the end, we must come out publicly with the truth: that we have no moral right whatever to oppose the return of the Arabs to their land...Until we have begun to redeem our sin against the Arab refugees, we have no right to continue the in-gathering of the exiles. We have no right to settle in a land that has been stolen from others while the owners of it are homeless and miserable.

We had no right to occupy the house of an Arab if we had not paid for it at its value. The same goes for fields, gardens, stores, workshops. We had no right to build a settlement and to realize the kind of Zionism with other people's property. To do this is robbery. Political conquest cannot abolish private property.^[37]

The AEN has the opportunity to make these facts known to university students. However, with pro-Zionist Advisory Board members such as Mark Yudof, Lawrence Summers and Deborah Lipstadt, these facts will probably not be a part of AEN's narrative. Yudof's statement that no hypocrisy or double standards will apply in regard to Israel^[38] will almost certainly be empty rhetoric.

Endnotes

[1] <http://www.academicengagement.org/en>.

[2] <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/we-must-defeat-bds-macro-aggression/>.

[3] Pappé, Ilan, *The Forgotten Palestinians: A History of the Palestinians in Israel*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011, pp. 16-17.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

[6] Pappé, Ilan, *The Idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge*, London: Verso, 2014, p. 277.

[7] Pappé, Ilan, *The Forgotten Palestinians: A History of the Palestinians in Israel*, New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2011, p. 15.

[8] Pappé, Ilan, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 130-131, 136-139.

[9] Segev, Tom, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1993, p. 63.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.

[11] Pappé, Ilan, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2007, p. xiii.

[12] Finkelstein, Norman G., *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History*, Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 2005, p. 8.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[14] Reinhart, Tanya, *The Road Map to Nowhere: Israel/Palestine since 2003*, London: Verso, 2006, pp. 1-2; Carter, Jimmy, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006, p. 74.

[15] Pappé, Ilan, *The Idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge*, London: Verso, 2014, pp. 272-273.

[16] Lilienthal, Alfred M., *The Zionist Connection: What Price Peace?*, New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1978, pp. 126-127, 743.

- [17] Finkelstein, Norman G., *Image and Reality of the Israeli-Palestine Conflict*, 2nd edition, New York: Verso, 2003, p. 135.
- [18] Reinhart, Tanya, *Israel/Palestine: How to End the War of 1948*, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002, p. 8.
- [19] Finkelstein, Norman G., *The Rise and Fall of Palestine: A Personal Account of the Intifada Years*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 52.
- [20] Pappé, Ilan, *Ten Myths about Israel*, London: Verso, 2017, p. 77.
- [21] Reinhart, Tanya, *Israel/Palestine: How to End the War of 1948*, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002, pp. 18, 175-176.
- [22] Reinhart, Tanya, *The Road Map to Nowhere: Israel/Palestine Since 2003*, London: Verso, 2006, pp. 157-160.
- [23] Pappé, Ilan, *The Idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge*, London: Verso, 2014, p. 40.
- [24] Farber, Seth, *Radicals, Rabbis and Peacemakers*, Monroe, Me.: Common Courage Press, 2005, p. 41.
- [25] Pappé, Ilan, *The Idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge*, London: Verso, 2014, pp. 272-273.
- [26] https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Golda_Meir
- [27] Segev, Tom, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1993, p. 399.
- [28] Reinhart, Tanya, *The Road Map to Nowhere: Israel/Palestine since 2003*, London: Verso, 2006, pp. 58-59, 157.
- [29] Pappé, Ilan, *Ten Myths about Israel*, London: Verso, 2017, pp. 130, 133.
- [30] Finkelstein, Norman G., *Gaza: An Inquest into Its Martyrdom*, Oakland, Cal.: University of California Press, 2018, p. 359.
- [31] *Ibid.*, p. 360.
- [32] *Ibid.*, pp. 363-364.
- [33] Baltzer, Anna, *Witness in Palestine: A Jewish American Woman in the Occupied Territories*, Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Publishers, 2007, p. 364.
- [34] <http://www.annainthemiddleeast.com/whatcanyou/boycott/index.html>.
- [35] Finkelstein, Norman G., *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestinian Conflict*, 2nd ed., New York: Verso, 2003, p. xxxiv.
- [36] <http://www.annainthemiddleeast.com/whatcanyou/boycott/index.html>.
- [37] Lilienthal, Alfred M., *The Zionist Connection: What Price Peace?*, New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1978, p. 748.

[38] <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/12/14/colleges-should-commit-robust-debate-about-middle-east-conflicts-essay>.

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